

Protect Yourself, Protect Your Pets

Maryland Recognizes "World Rabies Day"

Vaccinations, events planned to help protect Marylanders from deadly virus

Department of Health & Mental Hygiene News Release

BALTIMORE, MD (September 24, 2010) - While Governor Martin O'Malley has proclaimed September to be Rabies Prevention Month, Tuesday, September 28 is the fourth annual **World Rabies Day**. Both state and global events highlight the need for parents and children to be aware of the danger rabies can pose to humans and animals, according to the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH).

"Protecting people and pets from this deadly virus depends on vaccinating our pets and avoiding contact with rabid animals," said Frances Phillips, DHMH Deputy Secretary for Public Health Services. "Maryland has been vigilant and while there has not been a human case of rabies acquired in Maryland for nearly 35 years, approximately 400 animals are confirmed rabid and over 1,000 Maryland residents receive rabies vaccination due to possible exposure each year."

The rabies virus attacks the nervous system. For humans, the disease is one hundred percent preventable through prompt, appropriate medical care. Yet, more than 55,000 people die of the disease each year; mostly in areas of the world that still have the "dog-to-dog" type of rabies transmission.

As of September of this year, 264 animals in Maryland were confirmed rabid. Raccoons, foxes, and bats account for the majority of these confirmed rabid animals, but all mammals are susceptible, including pets and livestock. Cats are the most common domestic animal diagnosed with rabies each year in Maryland and the U.S. All Maryland local health departments offer low-cost animal rabies vaccination clinics.

"Marylanders can protect themselves and their pets by making sure their pets are vaccinated against rabies," said Heather Hauck, Director of the DHMH Infectious Disease and Environmental Health Administration. "Preventing exposure to this virus is paramount but if exposure occurs, treatment must begin as soon as possible to be fully effective."

When a person is bitten by a rabid animal, the disease is prevented with a four-dose rabies vaccine series administered over a period of 14 days and a dose of rabies immunoglobulin given at the beginning of the series.

World Rabies Day and Rabies Prevention Month activities will include:

- Low-cost animal rabies vaccination clinics on or around September 28 in several jurisdictions, including Cecil, Harford, and Worcester counties.
- An Open House by the Prince George's County Animal Management Division.
- A countywide cable TV broadcast of a special rabies education segment of "Public Health Matters," a local health information television program by the Harford County Health Department.
- A day of events with the Virginia Department of Health and the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine to raise awareness about rabies and funds to support Maryland and Virginia animal shelters will be held in Blacksburg, VA on September 25. Special activities will include a dog wash and Rabies Rounds, which are presentations on the national and international impact of rabies.

Remember these steps to protect yourself and your pets from rabies:

- Vaccinate your dogs, cats, ferrets, and other animals against rabies.
- Enjoy wildlife from a distance.
- Do not let pets roam free.
- Cover garbage cans securely and do not leave pet food outside.
- Prevent bats from entering your home. If you find a bat in your home, do not touch it. Only let it go if you are sure no people or household pets had contact with it. If it is alive, you can catch it by placing a small box, bowl, or can over it once it has landed to roost, and then slide a piece of cardboard under the container to trap the bat inside. Tape the cardboard to the container and contact your local health department.

- If you or your pet is exposed to a rabid or suspected rabid domestic animal, get the owner's name, address and telephone number.
- Contact your local health department or animal control agency in the event of an exposure.

For More Information:

1. To learn more about rabies in Maryland, including rabies surveillance statistics and efforts to prevent and control the disease, please visit the DHMH website, [rabies](#).
2. For information on low-cost animal rabies vaccination clinics in your county, please contact your local health department or visit [their website](#).
3. For information on activities to at the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine, please visit their [calendar](#).
4. To learn more about World Rabies Day please visit: www.worldrabiesday.org.